KConnect
Empathy Practice

Empathy

Building empathy for the people you serve means understanding their actions and the motivations behind them. This understanding enables us to identify unmet physical, cognitive, social, and/or cultural needs we can meet through the creation (or tweaking) of initiatives.

CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Empathy is the heart of the design thinking process. It starts and ends with the people you are designing for — understanding their experiences, histories, thoughts, beliefs, and values can yield insights that will help you identify the right problem to solve. Immerse yourself in the world of the people you are designing for. If timing permits, try interviewing them in their homes or observing them in action using your product or service. Listen deeply to their stories while keeping a keen eye on their behavior; what they do can often speak louder than what they say.

BE CURIOUS, NOT CLOSED

Assume a beginner's mindset: see their responses and behaviors for what they are, without clinging to prior assumptions about the supporting motivations. Ask questions that evoke stories, and when emotions are visible ask about them. Flag the surprises, contradictions, and tensions to dig into—these are valuable and can help you better understand deeper motives, aspirations, and beliefs.

Card Sorting Pro-Tips

CARD SORTING IS A STORY SPARK

Card-sorting is often used to force-rank potential options. We use them a little differently. Card sorting for us is primarily an exercise in sparking conversation to understand the thoughts, feelings, experiences, beliefs and behaviors of a person. Although the placement is important, it's not as important as the WHY behind it. If someone quickly places a card at the top or bottom of a sort along with a non-verbal cue, chances are there's a story behind the placement. That's what we're interested in…

ENCOURAGE STORIES. DIG FOR EMOTION.

Stories reveal how people think and feel about the world — infinitely more than "Yes," and "No." When you see an emotion, ask about it. "I noticed you were excited when you placed that card at the top…can you tell me/us about what's behind that?"

LISTEN WITH MORE THAN YOUR EARS

Be aware of nonverbal cues: consider body language and emotions. When you spot an emotion…ask about it!

DON'T SHY AWAY FROM SILENCE OR SUGGEST ANSWERS

Even if they pause before answering, don't "help them" by suggesting an answer. Often, if you allow there to be silence, a person will reflect.

FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO ASK WHY?

Find creative ways to get to "the thing behind the thing." With card-sorting, that's the gold we're digging towards! There are hundreds of ways to ask "why…" Try alternate ways of asking to understand their feelings, experiences, hopes, and the underlying why supporting it (see "Follow Up Questions" on the next page).
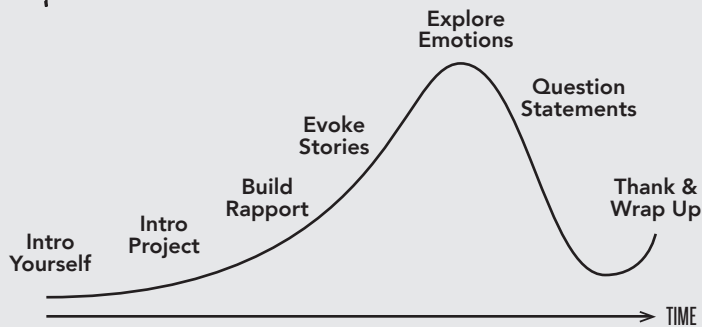
LOOK FOR SURPRISES, CONTRADICTIONS, AND TENSIONS

Sometimes what people say and what they do (or say later) are different. If you spot some inconsistencies, find tactful ways to inquire further.

KNOW WHEN TO STAY ON THE PATH, AND WHEN TO LEAVE IT

Respond to what your interviewee offers. Follow up. Go deeper. Use simple questions like "Oh, why do you say that?" and "What was that like for you?" If a question isn't resonating,

Sparking Question:
What drives you as you think about your future?

Intro Yourself → Intro Project → Build Rapport → Evoke Stories → Explore Emotions → Question Statements → Thank & Wrap Up
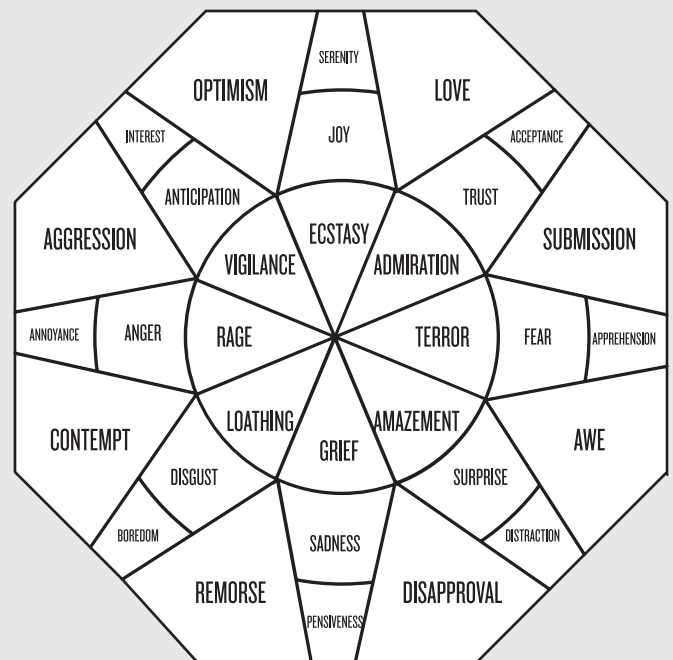
TIME

The Set-Up

It takes time to build the trust necessary to talk about stuff below the surface. Open body language, a genuine interest in responses, and solid plan to ramp your questions from topical to emotional can do a lot to increase your chances of success.

Spotting Emotions

Work on honing your "emotional radar" and digging for the stories behind them. The graph to the right was developed by Robert Plutchik as a way of showing what he believed to be the eight primary bipolar emotions: joy versus sadness; anger versus fear; trust versus disgust; and surprise versus anticipation — tune your radar in to the emotions of your interviewee, and inquire about them (graciously) when spotted.

OPTIMISM, SERENITY, LOVE, INTEREST, JOY, ACCEPTANCE, ANTICIPATION, TRUST, AGGRESSION, ECSTASY, VIGILANCE, ADMIRATION, SUBMISSION, ANNOYANCE, ANGER, RAGE, TERROR, FEAR, APPREHENSION, LOATHING, AMAZEMENT, CONTEMPT, GRIEF, AWE, DISGUST, SURPRISE, BOREDOM, SADNESS, DISTRACTION, REMORSE, DISAPPROVAL, PENSIVENESS

Follow Up Questions

1. What was the hardest part about… ?
2. Can you tell me the last time that happened?
3. Why was that hard?
4. How did you solve that problem?
5. If you could solve it again, how would you?

Focus your questions on actual (and specific) past encounters. Challenge your team to get answers…and the supporting rationale. When digging deeper, find creative ways to ask, "why?" The five sample questions to the left are useful for uncovering what people do and the underlying reasons why without being so pointed.

Fear	**Meaningful Work**
$$$	**Community Expectations**
Family	**Interests**
Safety / Security	**Fame**
Fate / Luck "Whatever happens, happens!"	**Power**
_____ Other	**Independence**

Sparking Question:
Can you rank the following careers by interest?

Easy Questions and the Tip of the Iceberg

DIGGING BENEATH THE SURFACE

You've probably heard the famous quip attributed to Henry Ford, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses." This saying speaks to the importance of insight in the design process. Innovators are able to peer beneath the surface to the deeper needs of the people they're designing for and imagine alternative solutions that better address their underlying appetites. Listening to stated needs is very important — and we're also interested in the stuff below the surface.

By exploring tensions, contradictions, and surprises we gain access to the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that people have but aren't able to clearly articulate in words. Understanding these latent needs and designing to meet them can allow your yet-to-be-created-good-or-service to delight them in deeper ways.

As you're practicing your card-sort, work on asking questions that dig to the thoughts, feelings, values, and beliefs that support the placement of cards. To the right is a short list of example questions to get you started, but lean on your own intuition to drive conversation deeper.

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS FOR HIGH-RANKING CARDS

What experiences make you think that's the best fit for you?
What about the day-to-day work of _____ interests you?"
What about that is so appealing?
Can you tell me about another time when you felt that way?
Can you tell me about time when you tried your hand at an aspect of that? What was that like for you? How did it make you feel?
If this was the job you ended up with, how would you feel?
What experiences make you think you'd feel that way?

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS FOR LOW-RANKING CARDS

What about that job would need to shift for you in order to make it more appealing?
What about the day-to-day work of _____ is unappealing to you?"
Do you know of anyone who has experience with that line of work?
What has that been like for them?
How has that impacted you?
If this was the job you ended up with, how would you feel?
What experiences make you think you'd feel that way?
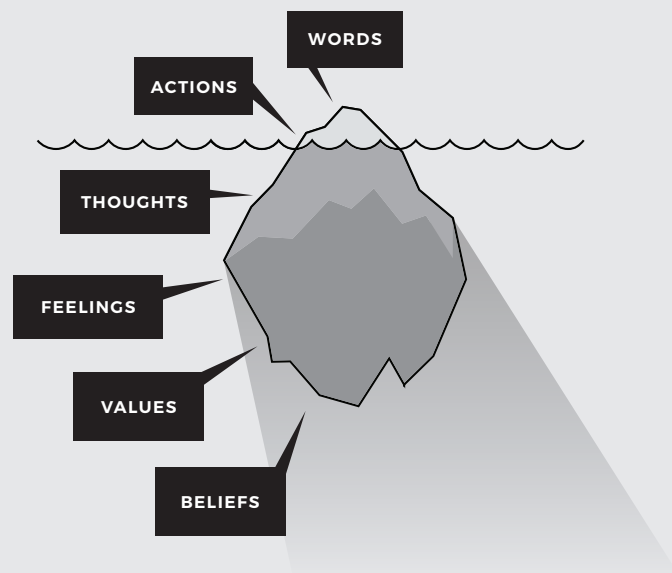
Police Officer	Graphic Designer
Engineer	Accountant
Nurse	App Developer
Farmer	Teacher
Fashion Designer	Musician
_____ Other	Manager